DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 431 845 UD 033 007

AUTHOR Fager, Jennifer; Brewster, Cori
TITLE Parent Partners: Using Parents To Enhance Education. By Request Series.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1999-03-00
NOTE 61p.
CONTRACT RJ96006501
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Program Descriptions

ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of reports on "hot topics" in education. It examines the current status of parent involvement in schools, taking into account specific definitions, recent research, and different types of parent involvement. The booklet explores ideas for implementing parent-involvement programs, outlines the potential pitfalls of such programs, and investigates what some schools in the northwestern United States are doing to involve parents successfully. For purposes of this discussion, parent involvement is defined as the active, ongoing participation of a child's parent or guardian in the child's education. Eight parent involvement programs are described. (Contains 20 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 431 845

BY REQUEST...

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PARENT PARTNERS:
Using Parents to Enhance Education

MARCH 1999

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

UD033-007

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BY REQUEST...

PARENT PARTNERS:
Using Parents to Enhance Education

JENNIFER FAGER
&
CORI BREWSTER

MARCH 1999

NORTHWEST REGIONAL
EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

Table Of Contents

Foreword 3

Introduction 4

Defining Parent Involvement 6

What does the Research Say? 8

How does Parent Involvement Help Kids? 10

Implementing a Parent-Involvement Program 12

- Planning and Preparation 12
- Engaging Parents 14
- Training Teachers 15
- Ongoing Program Management 16

Dealing with Difficult Parents 18

Potential Pitfalls 20

Conclusion 21

The Northwest Sampler 22

- Alaska 23
- Idaho 26
- Montana 32
- Oregon 40
- Washington 47

Related Web Sites 52

References 53

Board of Directors 55

Acknowledgements 57

FOREWORD

This booklet is the 11th in a series of "hot topic" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the Laboratory from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet contains a discussion of research and literature pertinent to the issue, a sampling of how Northwest schools are addressing the issue, suggestions for adapting these ideas to schools, selected references, and contact information.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet gives practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success in certain areas. The goal of the series is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

Other titles in the series include:

- Service Learning in the Northwest Region
- Tutoring: Strategies for Successful Learning
- Scheduling Alternatives: Options for Student Success
- Grade Configuration: Who Goes Where?
- Alternative Schools: Approaches for Students at Risk
- All Students Learning: Making It Happen in Your School
- High-Quality Professional Development: An Essential Component of Successful Schools
- Student Mentoring
- Peaceful Schools
- After-School Programs: Good For Kids, Good For Communities

INTRODUCTION

Finding common ground between parents' love for their children and intense desire for them to succeed, and teachers' love for their students and intense desire for them to succeed can be a difficult task. Though both share the same desire for student achievement, parents are naturally devoted to their child, while teachers and schools must consider all students when making decisions. This is where challenges often arise. Parents must advocate for their child—if they don't, who will? And educators must contemplate a never-ending stream of demands, technicalities, politics, and regulations in determining how they interact with students and parents. These conflicting demands can be the source of much confusion and frustration for both parents and educators. Sadly, suspicion and ambiguity or apathy often prevent parents and educators from forming alliances that can maximize children's success in school.

It is difficult to dispute the benefits parent involvement can have upon children's school experiences, yet parents and educators often hold one another at arm's length, unsure of the role each should play. Compounding these uncertainties are the perceptions educators and parents often have about the roles the other should play. Some teachers love to have parents intricately involved in their classrooms, while others feel that too much parent involvement violates their sense of professionalism and prefer to have limited communication with parents and receive visits only at predetermined times. Similarly, some parents try to be at their children's schools on a regular basis and are willing to do just about any task needed, while others are rarely available. Obviously, it's difficult to create a situation that is suitable to everyone.

In this booklet, we will examine the current status of parent involvement in schools, taking into account specific definitions, recent research, and different types of parent involvement. We will also look at ideas for implementing parent-involvement programs, explore the potential pitfalls of such programs, and investigate what several Northwest schools are doing to involve parents successfully.

Defining Parent Involvement

For the purposes of this booklet, parent involvement is defined as the active, ongoing participation of a child's parent(s) or guardian(s) in his or her education. It is recognized that there are many different ways for parents to participate in their children's education, from reading to children at home, to assisting in the classroom, to sitting on advisory councils at school.

Epstein (1995; 1996) identifies six basic types of parent involvement that schools can promote:

- **Parenting:** Schools can assist families in setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Providing information on child and adolescent development and helping parents strengthen parenting skills are two ways schools can increase and support parents' involvement at home in their children's education.
- **Communicating:** By increasing and encouraging school-to-home and home-to-school communications, schools can improve overall communication with families about school programs and student progress.
- **Volunteering:** Schools can involve parents as volunteers in activities at school or in other locations to support students and school programs. Schools that put time into recruitment and training, provide a variety of opportunities for involvement, and are willing to work around parents' schedules have the most success in getting parents to volunteer.
- **Learning at home:** Schools can involve families in children's academic learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions.

- **Decisionmaking:** Schools can involve parents in school decision-making by including them as participants in advisory committees, site councils, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and other parent and school organizations.
- **Collaborating with community:** Schools can coordinate the work and resources of local businesses, community organizations, colleges and universities, and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Schools can also provide services for parents and other community members, such as parenting, adult literacy, and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes.

Although each type of parent involvement may yield different results for children and schools, all are equally valuable. This said, it is also important for educators to note that parents have different skills and differing levels of comfort when it comes to school involvement (Decker, Gregg, & Decker, 1996). While some like to be in classrooms, directly involved with many students, others like to play behind-the-scenes roles. In order to avoid alienating a segment of the parent population, schools must recognize personal preferences, value the different roles volunteers can play, and provide a variety of ways for them to become involved (Decker et al., 1996; Epstein, 1995).

What Does The Research Say?

Recent years have brought an increased awareness of the advantages parent involvement has on the academic and social success of children in school. In 1994, the importance of parent involvement was officially recognized when it was designated as one of the National Education Goals in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The goal states: "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children." In *Parent Involvement and Participation* (1997), the U.S. Department of Education notes that "research over the past 30 years has consistently shown that greater family involvement in children's learning is a critical link to achieving a high-quality education and a safe, disciplined learning environment for every student." Unlike many topics in education, parent involvement is one issue where most experts agree-quite simply, it works.

Key findings of recent research on parent involvement include:

- Most parents want to be involved in their children's education. According to Epstein (1988), "Family requests for involvement are constant." Studies show that the majority of parents "want to know how to help their children at home and what they can do to help their children succeed" (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 1992).
- Research suggests that "the most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children in learning activities at home" (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). The earlier in a child's education process this begins, the more effective it will be (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

- The involvement of fathers in the education of their children can make a significant difference in overall achievement. A 1996 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that high father involvement improves the likelihood that children in grades one tol2 will earn high grades, and reduces the likelihood that children in grades six to 12 will be suspended or expelled from school (NCES, 1996).
- Schools' efforts to promote parent involvement are more significant than parental income and level of education in determining whether or not parents become engaged with the school (U.S. Department of Education 1997). Epstein (1988) found that it is "teachers' practices, not the education, marital status, or work place of parents that [makes] the difference in whether parents are productive partners in children's education."
- Parent involvement is higher when schools welcome parents and make it easy for them to be involved; when classroom and school discipline are maintained; and when teachers and students respect one another (NCES, 1996).
- And finally, teacher training is an essential component of developing and supporting effective parent-involvement activities (Williams & Chavkin, 1985; Decker et al., 1996; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997; Liontos, 1992). Researchers emphasize that "school efforts to promote family involvement in children's education will succeed only if teachers are adequately prepared to support these efforts" (Shartrand et al., 1997).

How Does Parent Involvement Help Kids?

In the more than 30 years of research on parent involvement, researchers have consistently found that parent involvement produces positive results for children (Decker et al., 1996). In its 1994 publication, *Parents and Schools: Partners in Education*, the Manitoba Department of Education and Training notes that "parents are more significant than either teachers or peers in influencing educational aspirations for the majority of children." The following list includes a few of the many benefits associated with parent involvement in children's education (Manitoba Department of Education and Training [MDET], 1994).

Benefits for students include:

- Improved academic performance
- Improved school behavior
- Greater academic motivation
- Lower dropout rates

Benefits for parents include:

- Enhanced sense of adequacy, self-worth, and self-confidence
- New ideas for helping their children learn as a result of working in the school environment
- Increased knowledge of child development
- Strengthened social networks
- Expanded community-involvement opportunities and networks
- Increased feelings of control over their environment
- Positive rapport with school

The benefits of parent involvement are not limited to students and parents. Parent participation can have a lasting impact on teachers and schools as well. Detailed below are a few of the potential benefits:

- Schools experience better parent and community relationships, as well as greater support and respect from the community (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989)
- Schools can provide teachers with better work environments (MDET, 1994)
- Schools receive extra help in implementing everyday programs, from one-on-one tutoring to schoolwide fund-raising efforts (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989)
- Schools can experience more effective academic and social programs (MDET, 1994)
- Schools can save money with increased parental involvement (money can be saved on materials, resources, and personnel)

Despite the abundance of research that exists on parent involvement, and the countless experts who agree on its importance, schools often struggle to engage a significant number of parents (MDET, 1994). In many schools, it is not uncommon for the same small group of parents to be the only ones to show up to volunteer or participate in school activities. On the other hand, it is also not uncommon for parents to find themselves wanting to be involved, but feeling unwelcome in the school and unsure how they fit in (Shartrand et al., 1997). Parents also may become frustrated if they volunteer their limited time (many parents take precious vacation time to volunteer at school) only to be assigned basic tasks such as making photocopies or stapling worksheets; they end up feeling underutilized and unappreciated. Helping parents understand the needs of schools, and helping schools understand how to optimize parents as resources, are key. Bringing the two sides together to form a strong partnership can be challenging, but when achieved, immeasurable benefits result.

Walking the Talk: Implementing a Parent-Involvement Program

Because an effective parent-involvement program is tailored to the unique qualities of the school-community it serves, a set formula for implementing a successful program is not practical. There are however, certain considerations that should be made by any school or district wishing to enhance an existing program or implement a new one. Following is a brief overview of these considerations and suggested steps for implementing them.

Planning and Preparation

The first order of business is to form a planning team to be in charge of designing the program and getting it off the ground. To ensure adequate representation of the total school community, the group should include teachers, parents, administrators, and members of the community. Teacher buy-in is critical at this stage of the process because without their support, program success can be next to impossible. Teachers, after all, will have the majority of contact with parents and volunteers. Buy-in can be made possible by involving teachers in the planning process, soliciting their input about the design and scope of the program, and allowing them flexibility in how they choose to implement it. For example, don't *require* teachers to use a certain number of volunteers each week for a specified number of hours; let them determine what will fit best with their schedules. The support of building administration is also necessary during initial planning and throughout implementation. A supportive administrator will put the staff at ease and provide them with the reinforcement that they will need along the way. Other important steps to take in the planning process are as follows:

1. Research parent involvement. If possible, members of the planning team should visit schools known to have exemplary parent involvement and explore how such efforts might be adapted to their school environment.
2. Hire or designate someone to coordinate the program. A successful effort will not be haphazard—it will be the result of a concerted effort of a team dedicated to the idea and a coordinator willing to go the extra mile to engage parents and staff. Many successful programs have enlisted parents to coordinate the effort.
3. Assess school needs. Consider how your school could best benefit from increased parent involvement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). For example, does your school need more help in each classroom? Is a tutoring or mentoring program something that you are interested in? Have budget shortfalls caused you to cut back on office staff or school supplies? Parents can assist in all of these areas.
4. Determine what the scope of the program will be (Epstein, 1995). Will it be a comprehensive, schoolwide effort? Or will it be a targeted program focused on one grade or classroom? Will teachers decide how parent involvement will play a role in their classrooms? Or will there be a common program and procedures for all classrooms?
5. Take inventory of parent volunteer strengths, their likes and dislikes, their special skills and talents, and their occupations and community connections (MDET, 1994). Capitalize on these things to make the program uniquely your own.
6. Consider student and parent diversity when developing the program, and be sensitive to daily constraints that make it difficult for some parents to spend time at school (e.g., job schedules or single-parent schedules) (Liontos, 1992).
7. Write a clear policy that lays out the parent-involvement procedures in an organized and concise fashion. Make the policy

readable and easily available to staff and parents (Williams & Chavkin, 1989).

8. Secure adequate funding for program development and administration, teacher training, and parent recruitment. If classroom teachers are involved in planning or staffing the program, ensure that funds are available to pay for substitutes and compensate teachers for their time and contributions to the program (Epstein, 1995).

Engaging Parents

The next step is to reach out to parents and solicit their involvement. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. One of the biggest stumbling blocks schools face in implementing parent volunteer programs is engaging significant numbers of participants (MDET, 1994). In addition, lower-income, minority, and non-English speaking individuals are frequently underrepresented in parent-involvement activities (Decker, Gregg, & Decker, 1996). The challenge is to design parent-involvement activities that are both attractive and accessible to the entire parent population. The following list details a few steps schools can take to reach out to parents and support their involvement in education.

1. Consider parents' needs and interests when planning parent-involvement activities, and provide a variety of ways and times for parents to get involved. Providing child care for parents of young children and conducting activities in multiple languages are two ways to make parent-involvement activities more accessible and inviting to diverse parents (Decker, Gregg, & Decker, 1996).

2. Ensure that the program coordinator or parent liaison actively recruits and communicates with parents. Having a staff person available to meet with parents in their homes or out in the community ensures that parents who are unable to come to school are included in parent-involvement efforts (MDET, 1994; Decker et al., 1996).
3. Concentrate on making parents feel comfortable in the school. Creating a room in the school building that is specifically for parents is a good way to let parents know they are welcome (MDET, 1994).
4. Offer orientation and training activities for parents (Decker et al., 1996). Cotton and Wikelund (1989) note that "parents generally want and need direction to participate with maximum effectiveness." However, they caution that "a little [training] is better than a lot."
5. To attract parents from diverse cultures, get one or two strong parent representatives from each target group to serve as school liaisons.

Training Teachers

Training teachers to effectively utilize parent involvement is critical to the success of any program (Williams & Chavkin, 1985; Shartrand et al., 1997; Liontos, 1992). Surprisingly, however, most preservice and inservice teachers never receive any formal training that shows them how to involve parents effectively (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). The Harvard Family Research Project (1995) identifies the following key areas on which teacher training efforts should focus:

- Bridging gaps between home and school culture
- Assuming the best intentions on the part of parents

- Helping families with limited financial resources and support networks to meet their basic needs
- Empowering families by providing them with encouragement, respect, and a voice in decisionmaking
- Providing opportunities to build "social capital" by engaging individuals in the life of the school, building trust among teachers and parents, and agreeing on mutual values and expectations for children

Additionally, schools must find a way to establish an "open door" policy while maintaining a professional work environment for teachers. Parents need to feel welcome in their children's schools and classrooms, yet teachers need to be afforded jobs that allow for autonomy and flexibility. Parents aren't spies, and teachers aren't foes. Mutual trust is the foundation of successful partnerships. And finally, schools need to be sensitive to teachers' time constraints. Requiring teachers to have more contact with parents increases their responsibilities and workload (Chavkin & Williams, 1988).

Ongoing Program Management

Depending on the type of parent-involvement program your school chooses to implement, different issues may arise over the course of the school year. General steps for keeping any parent-involvement program running smoothly include the following:

1. Commit to a policy of open communication. Communications between school and home must occur frequently and on a regular basis (Williams & Chavkin, 1989).

2. Recognize and celebrate the contributions of parents and any other volunteers that take time out of their schedules to assist at the school (Decker, Gregg, & Decker, 1996).
3. Regularly evaluate the program to ensure it is positively impacting teachers, students, and parents (Epstein, 1988). Look for ways the program can be improved and keep an eye out for opportunities to involve even more stakeholders (Williams & Chavkin, 1989).

Dealing With Difficult Parents

Call them "challenging," "hard-to-handle," or "difficult"—regardless of the term used, there will always be parents who seem more like obstacles than partners. Difficult situations are inevitable, simply because it is impossible to make everyone happy all of the time. There are many ways to characterize difficult parents. For example, they can be negative or critical individuals who seem to have an axe to grind with the school; they can appear to be apathetic individuals who have little interest in what their child does at school; or they can be chronic complainers who seem impossible to please (Boutte, Keepler, Tyler, & Terry, 1992). While difficult parents can pose challenges for school staff, by keeping the focus on the student, disparate personalities can usually arrive at mutually agreeable solutions. When considering how to bolster parent involvement, schools need to provide staff with strategies for dealing with difficult parents.

The list below provides some suggestions:

- Approach difficult situations with an attitude of respect and a willingness to listen; remember that you and the parent have at least one thing in common—the desire for his or her child to succeed (Rich, 1995; Boutte, et al., 1992; Smith, 1997).
- Address specific complaints with ideas about what you and the parent can do together to find a solution (Rich, 1995).
- Exercise empath—always take some time to walk in the parent's shoes and try to gain an understanding of his or her perspective (Rich, 1995).
- Express an attitude that is pleasant, not defensive or negative (Smith, 1997).

- Keep tense conversations focused on the child by saying throughout the conversation, "I care about your child." This will not only soften a difficult parent's attitude, but it will also prevent the teacher from feeling persecuted (Rich, 1995).
- Stand firmly by school policies, but admit mistakes when appropriate. Parents will respect teachers for being honest, consistent, and contrite (Smith, 1997).

Remember that every parent will not be won. Although it is important to do everything possible to maintain a positive working relationship with all parents and volunteers, the bottom line is that some will regard the school with animosity despite any actions taken by educators. In addition, personality conflicts can occur between even the best teachers and the most willing parents. This is human nature, and no amount of diplomacy can fix some situations.

Potential Pitfalls: What To Watch For

New programs, or changes to existing ones, will inevitably bring uncertainty. It takes time to get programs off the ground, and, as they evolve, there are always potential pitfalls to avoid. For optimum success, keep in mind the following:

- **Teacher training:** Provide adequate inservice so teachers aren't confused about the role parents play in the school. Without such discussions, involvement experiences for both schools and parents may be very dissatisfying (MDET, 1994). Parents need to feel that they are valued partners making a worthwhile contribution to the school.
- **Burnout prevention:** Avoid taking advantage of the generosity of any volunteer or staff member. Inevitably, there will always be a few people who are willing to work above and beyond the call of duty. While this is helpful to the school, it can lead to burnout for some of the school's most ardent supporters (Decker, Gregg, & Decker, 1996).
- **Student safety:** Make certain that guidelines are in place to ensure student safety at all times (Decker et al., 1996).
- **Crisis control:** Address problems as they occur and work as a team to solve them; do not ignore them.

Conclusion

Many complex issues contribute to the success or failure of any parent-involvement effort—teacher and parent willingness, school climate, administrative support, and teacher training are a few crucial issues that must be addressed by any school system wishing to improve parent participation. To be sure, effectively engaging parents is an ongoing task that requires commitment on behalf of all stakeholders, but it is an effort that must be made. The rewards students stand to gain are too great for schools not to try.

The Northwest Sampler

On the following pages are descriptions of several parent-involvement programs. Though the programs differ in design, each seeks to actively involve parents in a variety of ways. These Northwest programs are by no means meant to represent an exclusive listing of exemplary programs; rather they are just a few of the many good ones found in the region and throughout the country. Some have been in existence for several years, while others are fledgling efforts. Some have chosen to describe every component of their program, while others wanted to focus on one element alone. Included for each site is location and contact information, a description of the program, observed outcomes as a result of the program, and tips directly from these educators to others looking to implement similar programs in their schools.

Location

West High School
1700 Hillcrest Drive
Anchorage, AK 99517-1399

Contact

Lance Bowie, Principal
Phone: 907/274-2502
Fax: 907/272-6176

Description

It is not uncommon for parents of high school students to feel out of the loop when it comes to school involvement. Most of them aren't sure where or how to begin, or if they are even welcome. Recognizing this ambiguity, West High School initiated a parent-involvement program by first establishing an open-door policy for parents and hiring a parent-involvement coordinator. It is the school's goal to make sure parents know they are welcome members of the school community, but they realize that sometimes parents need an "excuse" to get involved. As a result, the school provides parents with several opportunities for participation. They can take part in one of many organized activities for parents, such as working in the parent-run school store (school sweatshirts and T-shirts are available at the store, as well as snacks and beverages), participating in school booster clubs, or volunteering as classroom aides. Most parent-involvement activities are sponsored by the school's Parent-Teacher-Student Association.

Lance Bowie, the principal at West High, is open to any idea a parent may have for other types of involvement. When a parent comes to him with a complaint about the school and suggests what he should do to fix it, he never tells them, "No, that can't be done." He instead says, "Show me how *we* can do it." He finds that if he can get parents to become hands-on, active members of the school com-

munity, they get a much clearer picture of what actually happens in the school and thus are less likely to criticize or complain. They become advocates instead of critical observers.

The schools' open-door policy, coupled with Bowie's encouragement and support of parents, has resulted in a high school with a very high rate of parent involvement. Fifty to 100 volunteers work in the school each week. They can choose to be behind the scenes (e.g., making costumes for school performances); they can be involved in the nuts and bolts of school operations (e.g., raising money for various activities, working in the school store, or participating in a booster club); or they can be on the front lines, actively assisting teachers in the classroom or working with students as tutors. Regardless of the type of involvement, all parent volunteers are valued at West High. Teachers are more comfortable with parents and no longer feel that parents are in school to spy on them. Parents are happy to be a part of their children's education and to support the school. Kids benefit from the extra adult attention and from knowing that their parents care deeply about their education.

Observed Outcomes

- Teachers feel at ease with parents being present in the building, and parents have a new respect for what teachers do
- Parents feel good about being part of the school and knowing that they are making a valuable contribution to their child's education
- Students realize how much their parents value them and their education

Keys to Success

- Never say "no" to a parent's idea. There is some good in every idea, so be open to new opportunities for partnership
- Accentuate the positive in all situations, and don't get caught up in battling over small details
- Give parents an excuse to get involved—sometimes they need a little coaxing

Location

Lake Hazel Elementary School
11711 Lake Hazel Road
Boise, ID 83709

Contact

Shawna Exline, Title I Parent Involvement and Literacy Facilitator
Phone: 208/362-3696
Fax: 208/362-3696

Description

Five years ago, Lake Hazel Elementary (LHE) opened its doors to incoming kindergartners and their parents. To help these young children make successful transitions to the school and its routines, Title I staff, with support and assistance of the school staff, created a family-involvement program called the Lake Hazel Cubs.

Targeting students the year prior to their official entry at Lake Hazel, the program operates from January until May. It incorporates five theme-based sessions that address the special needs of children facing their first school experience. The themes—which include academic success, literacy, school specialists, math/science, and getting to school safely/riding the bus—help to prepare kids and parents for school.

The school advertises the program through newsletters, community flyers, and posters placed at area day-care centers. In January of the year preceding kindergarten enrollment, participants contact the school to register. Annually, about one-third of the incoming class and their families participate in the Cubs program.

Cubs and their parents participate in a 45-minute meeting once a month. Each session opens with a story, is followed by an in-school field trip, and concludes with an activity time for parents and children. Before heading out the door, the group shares cookies and punch.

LHE staff involved with the Cubs find that being part of a team helping to alleviate anxiety about school is very rewarding.Dixie Seegmiller, a Lake Hazel Elementary parent and seasoned Cub participant, has had three children participate in the program. She notes, "The Cub program calmed my children's fears about coming to school. School became a familiar place. My children were more excited and less fearful about the coming school year." Principal Jackie Meyer, an ardent supporter of the program, agrees wholeheartedly that "exposure to school before actually attending is important." Based on the success of the Cubs program, all district elementary schools are now required to offer an incoming kindergarten program similar to the Cubs.

The number of program participants grows each year. Teachers, parents, and the incoming kindergartners treasure the program and believe that it makes the transition from home to school a rewarding experience. Parents believe the program makes a difference for children because time spent in Cubs ensures that the experience of attending school in the fall will be much less threatening. Cubs know where the library, lunchroom, office, gym, playground area, and bathrooms are before school even starts. They know what other kindergarten children look like, what kindergarten teachers look like, and what kindergarten classrooms look like. School is not scary and unknown to them, like it is for many small children entering the building for the first time.

The goal of the Lake Hazel Cubs program is to start children out with the most positive school experience possible. With the dedication of teachers, parents, and administrators, the school is doing just that.

Observed Outcomes

- The program eases the transition from home to school for both parents and children
- Parents and children become familiar and comfortable with the school. They meet school staff and learn where to find important school locations
- Through the Cubs program, parents get a better idea of the academic and social expectations for children
- The program gives staff an early opportunity to identify special needs in children, such as speech difficulties, and to ensure that children have necessary immunizations
- Kindergartners who have been in the program have more self-assurance and are more enthusiastic about school. This carries over into other grade levels as they travel the path of their school career

Keys to Success

- Advertise the program throughout the community
- Have a month-by-month plan of action, and communicate with involved staff
- To facilitate smoothly run meetings and activities, make sure you have adequate supplies (such as registration forms, sign-in sheets, treats, and buttons for students to wear) and that the overall program is clearly organized
- Keep the program format consistent and user-friendly
- Communicate genuine concern for families through your actions and words

Location

Pocatello School District
3115 Poleline Road
PO Box 1390
Pocatello, ID 83204-1390

Contact

Joan Bowman, Title I Director
Phone: 208/235-3249
Fax: 208/235-3280

Description

The Pocatello School District offers many programs to involve parents and families in the education of their children, but two activities targeted for Title I students and their families stand out as uniquely successful. These are 1) goal-setting parent conferences, and 2) monthly parent workshops.

For Title I students, each school year begins with a goal-setting conference. The conferences—which are attended by the student, their parents, and the Title I teacher—are provided as a time to set learning goals. Parents are asked what they would like for their child to learn throughout the year, and what they believe to be positive goals for the child to work toward. They also have the opportunity to discuss expectations they may have of teachers. Students are asked what specifically they would like to improve. It is communicated to them that they are an equal partner with their parents and teachers in working to meet the learning goals. Lastly, teachers identify a goal or goals for individual students that incorporates and builds upon the goals outlined by the parents and student. Classroom teachers, current as well as from the previous year, are also consulted to determine what they see as learning priorities and issues for targeted students.

The conference leads to the Home/School Compact—an individualized guide designed to help students meet their learning goals. In it, the student, teacher, and parents are asked to identify those things that they will do during the year to help achieve the goals. Parents are given copies of the goal sheet and the compact. Parent surveys have found the goal-setting conferences to be very well received. The process conveys to parents that the school values their knowledge and respects their concerns.

Based on weekly anecdotal records kept by Title I teachers, and rooted in the goals set at the beginning of the year, narrative progress reports are provided to parents halfway through the school year. These discuss areas where growth has occurred and areas where more work is still needed. Goals can be reviewed and revised, or newly established at this time, depending on student need. Though the progress reports are time consuming, teachers are committed to them because parents find them to be extremely helpful.

The Title I program also holds monthly workshops for families. The workshops are designed to give parents ideas about how to help their children at home. The workshops deal with a wide range of learning issues, including literacy and math instruction, student motivation, children's literature, and parent stress.

The workshops are held in a different school each month, but invitations are sent to Title I parents in all of the district's 15 school buildings. This has proven to be a very effective method. Though the day of the week varies from month to month, the workshops are always offered in the evenings to accommodate the work schedules of most parents. Activities are usually provided in another room for children while the workshop is in progress. Title I staff have found that attendance increased dramatically when parents were able to bring their children with them. The workshops and children's activity groups are conducted by Title I teachers, which encourages parents to attend and raises their comfort levels. Inexpensive books are purchased, and each child is sent home with a book at the end of most workshops.

Observed Outcomes

- Parents truly feel like they are a part of their child's education
- Parents express a more positive feeling toward school and teachers
- More parents are actively involved in their children's schoolwork

Keys to Success

- Be sure that the compact process is perceived as an activity that is beneficial to the parents
- Accept the parent's goals for their children
- Realize that success comes gradually, and it will take a while for parents to "spread the word" about workshop effectiveness

Location

Hellgate Elementary School
2385 Flynn Lane
Missoula, MT 59802

Contact

Bruce Whitehead, Principal
Phone: 406/549-6109
Fax: 406/728-5636

Description

For more than 15 years, parent involvement has been a critical component of successful education at Hellgate Elementary, which serves 400 third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders. Known as the Parent Partnership Program, the program at Hellgate involves over 100 parent volunteers each week, who are called "parent aides." Principal Bruce Whitehead feels that the program is the backbone of the school, calling it "the most important thing a school can do." He notes that if a school has a successful parent-involvement program, all other things will fall into place.

The program is codirected by a parent-aide coordinator and a teacher coordinator. Its primary focus is to put parents directly into classrooms. The program operates by only a couple of rules, and even they are not necessarily strictly enforced. First, parents should not be placed in their own child's class and, second, parents should be placed in a class that is a grade level above where their child currently is. These restrictions are in place for a few reasons: 1) to free up parents from tending specifically to their own children and instead focus on their role as an aide to the school; 2) to help teachers feel more comfortable with their day-to-day work (they are less likely to feel "on display" or scrutinized if the volunteers in their classroom are not parents of current students); and 3) to familiarize parents with the curriculum their child will have during the subsequent year.

At the beginning of each school year, parent-involvement forms are sent out to all school families. The form is the tool the school uses to match parent interests, preferences, and skills with teacher and school needs. Coordinators sort through returned forms and make the best matches between parents and teachers, keeping in mind skills, needs, and personalities. Once matched with a teacher, all new parent aides are shown how to operate school equipment (e.g., the copy and fax machine). There is no requirement set for the amount of time aides are to spend in the school each week. The roles of parent aides vary from classroom to class-room. In some rooms, they grade papers and put up bulletin boards, while in others they work with small groups of children or tutor individual students.

A few months into the school year, the school surveys the parent aides. This allows them to ensure that placements are working well for both parents and teachers. In the event that a parent signs up to be a parent aide but does not show up as regularly scheduled, teachers are instructed to set aside work that is not urgent and can be done at any time. This way, if the parent does come in at some point, there is work set aside for them. The volunteer feels useful, the teacher gets certain projects out of the way, and it remains a positive experience for everyone involved.

At the end of the year, each aide is recognized individually with a celebration hosted by the teacher and students he or she assisted. The parents are given small tokens of appreciation by the school and the children.

Observed Outcomes

- The Parent Partnership Program not only helps teachers and students, but it also helps many of the parents involved to rediscover themselves and their talents. For many, the experience is very empowering and provides them with newfound confidence in themselves
- Most parents that are involved with the school as aides become active advocates for the school and its mission
- One in four parents at Hellgate are involved in the Parent Partnership Program

Keys to Success

- Work to ensure that the experience is positive for everyone involved—parents, teachers, and students
- Openly communicate expectations with parents
- Provide volunteers with recognition—it is important that they know how valued they are as members of the school community

Location

Roosevelt School
503 Edith Street
Missoula, MT 59801

Contact

Joe Stauduhar, Principal
Phone: 406/542-4075
Fax: 406/542-4076

Description

Three goals guide the education of Roosevelt School's 225 students. One goal focuses on student literacy, one targets technology, and one stresses the importance of parent involvement in the school. All are viewed with equal importance, but it is the parent-involvement goal that pervades instruction, family activities, and other school functions.

The school uses three different types of outreach to involve parents and families. These include the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the site-based council, and the Family Resource Center (FRC). Each is different in scope and function, yet all share the common theme of parent involvement. This commitment to parent involvement is reflected in the school's mission statement:

> *"The mission of Roosevelt School is to provide an environment of learning for all students, staff, and parents with a focus on activities that support the development of lifelong learners."*

Each outreach effort and the activities it sponsors are described below.

1. **Parent Teacher Association.** The PTA meets monthly and produces a monthly newsletter, sponsors activities, and organizes other schoolwide events, including:

- **The Spring Fling:** Featuring student art displays and band and orchestra performances, the Spring Fling is devoted to recognizing the more than 200 volunteers who donate time annually at Roosevelt
- **The Annual Open House:** A time for all parents and families to come together at the school and get to know children's teachers and school routines

2. **Site-Based Council.** Composed of three teachers, one classified staff person, the building principal, and four parents, the Site-Based Council addresses school and district issues that affect the day-to-day operations of the school, such as school closures or the hiring of new administrators. The council meets on a monthly basis and is the school's main liaison to the school board.
3. **Family Resource Center.** The FRC at Roosevelt is one of eight such centers operating in Missoula County Public Schools. Six of the centers are in K-5 elementary buildings, while two are located in middle schools. Each of the FRCs has a unique "flavor" due to the neighborhood, school, staff, and parents who shape the role the center plays in the school community. The eight centers are the result of a unique collaborative effort between Missoula County Public Schools and other outside organizations. This five-year funding partnership involves the integration of education and human services, and began with the center at Roosevelt in early 1993.

   Roosevelt's FRC is staffed part-time by a Family Advocate (social worker) and two part-time Family Outreach Specialists. It operates with Title I funds as well as other public funding. The purpose of the FRC is to provide families with support, information, and social activities, in a comfortable, no-pressure setting. It operates under the assumption that all families have strengths and the capacity to determine their own needs. They work to increase parental participation in children's education by providing opportunities for involvement. The ultimate goal of all

Missoula's centers is to help children succeed in school. Activities such as those described below strive to meet that goal each day.

- **Parent-Child Luncheons:** Once a month, parents of students in a selected grade are invited in to the FRC to have lunch with their child. Parents may bring their lunch with them or order one from the school the morning of the luncheon. Luncheons are held during the selected grade's regularly scheduled lunch period and feature a story and a craft project to work on. The luncheons have been very popular, as evidenced by the 50 to 70 percent of parents who attend each time
- **Parent Readers:** Parents have the opportunity to go to their child's classroom on a short- or long-term basis and read stories to small groups of students. It is a very informal program that is left up to classroom teachers to initiate and tailor to their specific needs
- **Family Fun Nights:** Every month the FRC sponsors a Family Fun Night. Parents, children, and any other interested family members are invited to the school to spend time participating in a variety of activities such as bingo, crafts, and other games. The focus of these nights is not specifically academic, but instead to allow families to come together and have a good time in a positive, learning-focused environment
- **Adult Classes:** The FRC offers computer and literacy classes free of charge to interested parents. Instruction is provided by a certified teacher and is based on individual need, so participants can begin at any time and come as often as desired
- **Family Activity Night:** Offered once a year and similar to the Family Fun Nights, but with an academic focus, Family Activity Night provides parents and students with structured literacy or math activities to work through together

- **Kindergarten Outreach:** Each fall, families of next year's incoming kindergartners are contacted by the FRC. Through these contacts, FRC staff set up home visits if needed, discuss resources available to families, inform parents about the school and it's routines, and, most important, welcome the families to the school
- **Hands At Work and Play:** Offered weekly to families of kindergartners during lunchtime from October to December, the FRC's Hands At Work and Play Program provides parents with ideas for activities they can do with their children at home. It also works to assist young children in developing and refining fine motor skills
- **Home Visitations:** During the school year, many Roosevelt families are contacted by FRC staff to schedule a home visit. Home visitations are done for several reasons, including to welcome families new to the school and to determine how the FRC can be of particular assistance to them. The visits are targeted at families who have been identified by school staff as having certain needs (e.g., families experiencing parenting difficulties or who are in need of community resources). The visits may be conducted at a family's home, in the resource center, or at another place and time convenient to the family. During the visits, families are provided with several pieces of information, including a packet that discusses the importance of literacy and suggests literacy activities parents can do with their children, and a packet of school-related information that details the services of the FRC. The visits are also a time for the FRC staff to provide children with a book, to further encourage reading in the home

Observed Outcomes

- The school's parent-involvement efforts not only provide assistance to the school and educational reinforcement to students, but also offer social outlets where parents can get to know each other and the school staff, and learn more about other community resources
- Parent involvement gives Roosevelt a different feel—a positive, upbeat climate where everyone has a common interest in the education of children and the improvement of families
- The adult education program gives parents the opportunity to develop skills and make connections that they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to make
- School staff who weren't exactly sure how the FRC would fit with their school routines when it first opened now believe fully in the mission of the FRC and see how it has benefited students and families. Referrals to the FRC from teachers have increased greatly in the past five years
- Parent involvement has increased every year since the FRC opened

Keys to Success

- Develop a school plan for parent involvement with teachers and then extend this planning to parents
- The plan should work to meet the unique needs of your community; it should be broad-based but focused
- Set school-involvement goals and reassess them annually
- Coordinate the involvement efforts of all stakeholders, including the PTA, the site council, and the FRC
- Have a central location for the FRC—someplace that is welcoming and easily accessible for parents

Location

Lincoln Elementary School
1132 NE 10th Street
Grants Pass, OR 97526

Contact

Dave Currie, Principal
Phone: 541/474-5770
Fax: 541/474-5718

Description

At Lincoln Elementary, parent involvement means more than putting parents in charge of "busy work" teachers don't have time to do. It means reaching out to parents, providing them with information and skills they may not already have; it means depending on them to mentor some of the school's troubled students; and it means using them as tutors to coach readers through the literacy process. At Lincoln, the parents are partners—they give to the school and they receive from the school.

Three times a year, parents are invited to Parent Night at Lincoln. Each Parent Night has a theme. When families arrive, they are served a dinner that is provided by a community business partner. Afterward, child care is provided while the parents have the opportunity to learn more about specific issues related to parenting skills or to discover new strategies for helping their children academically. They get to choose two of three half-hour sessions that are offered by different speakers.

Parents can volunteer to be part of a tutoring program called Mentor Match, which pairs them with an identified child to specifically target reading. Lincoln has approximately 40 volunteers in-volved in the Mentor Match program, 50 percent of which are parents. The volunteers work 30 minutes each week and generally volunteer for the entire year, though some serve for a semester only. The Title I

Coordinator oversees the program by arranging with classroom teachers the best time for a volunteer to work with a particular student. In addition, the Title I Coordinator provides the mentor with a notebook of activities designed to meet students' individual reading needs. This notebook is updated as students' skills progress.

Parents can also become involved in the Special Friends Program. This effort matches a parent volunteer with a student who is having difficulty succeeding in the classroom. (It is not for students having severe behavior or personal problems.) For a half-hour each week, the volunteer and student spend time together. They play games, talk, and have fun. The volunteer's role is simply that of supportive friend—an adult who cares. The school provides a meeting room for the special friends.

Observed Outcomes

- Student behavior has improved; referrals to the office have been reduced
- Teachers have noticed a positive change in those students involved in Special Friends
- Overall test scores have improved, especially reading at the third-grade level
- The number of volunteers and parents in the school continues to grow each year
- Parents are able to provide assistance to their students using the same terminology and procedures as the staff

Keys to Success

- Find a program that fits your school and stick with it
- A team approach to developing your program is important
- Send staff to visit other schools and see what works in those schools—the larger the visitation team, the better

Location

Richmond Elementary School
466 Richmond Avenue, SE
Salem, OR 97301

Contact

Kathy Bebe, Principal
Phone: 503/399-3180
Fax: 503/316-3535

Description

Realizing that different parents have different levels of comfort when it comes to school involvement, and recognizing that its parent population has a variety of special needs, staff at Richmond Elementary School set out nine years ago to create a parent-involvement program capable of accommodating all parents' desires to participate in the education of their children. Factors such as having one of the highest poverty rates in the state, a high mobility rate, and a large percentage of English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) students all contribute to a unique set of challenges at Richmond. To make parent involvement a priority to the entire Richmond education community, the school had to first start by building a strong parent network. They needed a core group of parents that could assume some leadership responsibility. Then it was necessary to create an awareness in the general parent population of the needs present in the school and how parents could contribute. The school also worked to provide parents with knowledge about the kinds of services and resources available to them through the school community.

Initial Efforts. Because they achieved their initial purpose, or because the school lost funding, the following programs are no longer active at Richmond. However, all were key in the initial development of the school's strong parent support network.

- ***Parent Staff Together (PST):*** Groups of about 15 parents and at least three staff members met monthly at a parent's home for the purpose of strengthening leadership and parenting skills. These groups of parents were identified as leaders and made a two-year commitment to the program. Because PST was received so well by parents, eventually the home groups grew to be too large. When enough parent interest and commitment to the school was fostered, the groups were discontinued
- ***Richmond Parent Club:*** The Parent Club planned general parent meetings quarterly throughout the school year. These meetings focused on community concerns, school-related programs/reports and fund raising. While many of these activities still occur, they are now sponsored by Richmond's Local School Advisory Committee (LSAC). The LSAC evolved from the efforts of the Parent Club. LSACs are required components for every school in Richmond's district. Their primary role is to link parents and the school community to the school board
- ***Parents As Teachers (PAT):*** This program was modeled after the Missouri Model, which received national recognition for its innovative work with parents of young children. PAT taught parenting skills through an established curriculum. It targeted parents beginning in their third trimester of pregnancy and continued services until the child was three years old. Because specialized and expensive training was required for PAT, the school was forced to put it on hold temporarily
- ***Parent Field Trips:*** To increase awareness of local resources and attractions, parents were invited to ride a school bus to local destinations to experience opportunities that were free to them and their families. Examples include the public library, the state capitol building, and local universities. Field trips no longer take place because of budget constraints

Supports. The following are measures the school has taken to ensure adequate supports for its parent-involvement efforts.

- ***Community School Outreach Coordinator:*** This position, which was new in the 1995-96 school year, coordinates the community-outreach and parent-involvement programs by assessing school, parent, and community needs. Funding for the position comes from district money set aside for high-needs schools
- ***Parent Compacts:*** A 21st Century Council subcommittee developed a parent compact form that was included in Richmond's 1996-97 Title I Schoolwide Program. Parent compacts serve as guides for student learning and work to make parents, students, and teachers accountable for their role in the learning process. Each party (parent, child, and teacher) signs the compact, which details how they will support one another to further the student's successful learning experiences throughout the school year
- ***Parent Lending Library:*** Parent resource materials and children's educational materials are available to parents on a check-out basis from this roving collection-on-wheels. The library is available during specific hours that complement the student's day and whenever the school holds parent-involvement activities

Activities. The following activities are currently being offered to Richmond families on an ongoing basis.

- ***Volunteer Work Parties:*** One afternoon each month, Richmond parents receive an invitation to come to school and spend time preparing materials for their child's teacher. Volunteers sit together in a comfortable atmosphere, working and getting to know one another while child care is provided in the music room for their preschool-age children. This is a very non-threatening way for parents who may be unfamiliar with the school and its routines, or for parents with limited English, to get involved in their child's education

- ***Kindergarten Packet Meetings:*** Once a month, the Title I child-development counselor meets at school with interested kindergarten parents to go over a packet of materials and suggest ways to enhance children's academic and social growth. The meetings are an opportunity for a small group of parents to focus on concerns pertinent to the kindergarten age group
- ***Love, Lunch, and Learn:*** This parent-support program gives all parents the opportunity to make a date to eat lunch with their children, followed by a session on parenting skills and topics pertinent to raising children. This program is offered on a monthly basis and is very well attended, sometimes with over 500 lunches being served (this includes children and parents)
- ***Parent Popover Breakfast:*** This activity happens about once a month and is a way for new families to become acquainted with Richmond's programs and staff. The principal, counselor, and a parent greeter meet with guest parents after they have breakfast with their youngsters. Parents are then given a tour of the building after the meeting. The breakfasts are by invitation only
- ***Math Family Nights:*** Four times a year, families are invited to come to school in the evening to learn about the existing math program and how to use manipulatives with their children. Stations are set up in the cafeteria for families to rotate through and experience some of the teaching techniques used with students in the classrooms
- ***1 Plus 1 - Success Math Program:*** Five times a year, parents are hosted in their child's classroom for a one-hour inservice provided by the Title 1 math resource teacher. Each classroom has this opportunity six times during the school year

Observed Outcomes

- Parents' level of comfort and trust in school settings has heightened over the years
- Hispanic parents and families are more aware of the role they can play in schools
- Staff morale is strong, and teamwork transverses many programs and activities
- Community response and interest in Richmond's programs has increased and brought in countless numbers of donations and volunteers in support of the school's efforts

Keys to Success

- Look for extremely dedicated and committed staff who do not allow ego to get in the way of promoting and implementing programs
- Give every staff member equal status and expect that they all have unconditional respect of one another—everyone should be willing to help out in whatever needs to be done
- Welcome parents with openness and a genuine desire to support them in their efforts to parent their children and be the best parents they can be, regardless of their educational level, socioeconomic status, or family background

Location

Mark Twain Elementary School
2450 S. Star Lake Road
Federal Way, WA 98003
253/945-3100

Contact

Linda Lee, Parent Advocate
Phone: 253/945-3122
Fax: 253/945-3131

Description

In every school there are a few parents who are eager to help. They are the individuals who always sign up to be room parents, chair PTA committees, or accompany the class on field trips. But what about the majority of parents who would like to be involved but aren't quite sure how, feel they have nothing to offer, or simply don't have time? Mark Twain Elementary seeks to involve these parents. By providing an array of involvement opportunities, they hope to appeal to every parent in some way.

Mark Twain has a renewed emphasis on parent involvement by incorporating it into the building learning plan. While there are still attempts to "recruit parents into the classroom," a broader focus is on reaching the hard-to-reach families. A philosophy of service and outreach to the school's diverse community prevails. Knowing that food, fun, and freebies attract most people, activities are planned with this in mind. When school events are designated for parents only, child care is always provided.

Mark Twain is a Schoolwide Title I site, serving 630 students in grades kindergarten through six. The school has nearly 200 English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) students, over 60 special education students, 65 percent of students on free or reduced lunch, and a highly mobile population with 65 percent turnover each

year (the school is fed by over 2000 apartments). To address all the special needs, cross-funding and partnerships with outside sources have become a way of life.

- ***Academics:*** Last year the school implemented Success For All (SFA), a research-based reading program focusing on early intervention to ensure that every child will succeed in reading. Students are tested upon entering the school and placed in groups matching their ability level. Every eight weeks students are reassessed to make sure they are progressing. All certified staff teach a daily 90-minute reading block. Coupled with this is the expectation that families will read for 20 minutes a night at home with their children.
- ***Communication:*** Staff members strive to narrow the gap between school and home. Grade-level teams publish regular newsletters, as do the principal and the PTA. Many teachers telephone or journal regularly with parents of focus students. Most boast 100 percent turnout at parent-teacher conferences. The school-leadership team has seven active parents that collaborate regularly with grade-level representatives and administrators. As a service to the school's ESL families, key documents are translated in three other languages.
- ***One-to-One Outreach:*** The school's Welcome Program seeks to know new families and assist them with the registration process. The Student Advocate interviews, photographs and takes new students on a tour, while the Parent Advocate assists with registration and discusses concerns with parents, including recommendations for community services if necessary. If a new family is non-English speaking, a Spanish-, Russian-, or Korean-speaking staff member is brought in to translate for them. An effort is made to give new students a reading test before entering school so they can be in an appropriate reading group from the start. Because the advocates take the time to see children a day before they enter class, teachers also get ad-

vance information and are better prepared to welcome them and to provide a buddy.

The Family Support Team, consisting of the principal, counselor, school psychologist, PTA president, attendance secretary, reading coordinator and parent advocate, offers staff members an opportunity to refer students of concern. The team meets with parents and incorporates a solution-building model that focuses on the student's strengths and offers several strategies to use with the child at home, at school, or within the community.

Home visits to every first grade household are a unique way to personalize the school to families. The doorstep canvassing of all homes provides an opportunity to hear concerns, or, at the very least, leave school information and a free book for the student.

- ***Partnerships:*** Connections to outside resources are critical to help finance some of the school's very special programs and to provide additional volunteers to read with kids. Costco Wholesale financially supplements the reading program and provides backpacks and start-up supplies for every student, including newcomers. Washington Mutual Bank sends volunteer tutors. A partnership with the nearby high school provides videotape of classroom activities, SFA work, and major events, so parents can check out videos of events they cannot attend. Americorps provides a volunteer two days a week. Students from a local community college share 90 hours of volunteer time as they earn education credits. A new dress code at Mark Twain requiring all students to wear a uniform has generated an additional partnership with a local church. Church members collect clothing donations that supply the Uniform Closet—a collection of used clothing that meets uniform specifications. All items from the Uniform Closet are free to students who are unable to afford new clothing. Church members also volunteer to read with kids on a regular basis. In addition to all of these partnerships, funding for free books, parenting classes, and staff development comes from several grants.

- ***Learning Opportunities:*** During the fall and spring, ESL classes are offered for adults. Parenting classes are also given in the fall. The annual open house at the beginning of the year draws crowds to hear teachers define curriculum and see students share their early work. Later in the year, every grade level has Curriculum Night that attracts large numbers. The PTA also sponsors special events and speakers and provides child care. In the winter of 1999, a six-week series of family workshops focused on building family literacy was also offered.
- ***Title I-Sponsored Family Events:*** Some of the most appealing attractions to families are Reading Nights (which include a storyteller or learning centers), Muffins with Mom in February, and Donuts with Dad in March. At all of these events, students who come with a parent are given refreshments and a free book, and have time to read together with their families. The school's dads have especially enjoyed this. In addition, monthly coffee socials are sponsored in surrounding apartment complexes to help stimulate parent-to-parent connections (local merchants donate coffee and donuts).
- ***Community Celebration:*** The school's most successful attractions are festive and family-oriented. Sample activities include International Night, which brings all ethnic groups together for student performances and an ethnic potluck; the talent show, which draws the families of all performers; Family Fun Night, offered by the PTA in December; several after-school skating parties during the year; and a barbecue celebration, which closes the year with staff and families celebrating together. Although parent involvement has always been a priority at Mark Twain, the focus over time has shifted from basic volunteering to engaging parents in a partnership with the school, in order to provide the best possible education for every child. Mark Twain Elementary School believes that the key to keeping their families is to engage them in learning and celebrating with their children.

Observed Outcomes

- Families are less wary of the school, asking more questions and making stronger commitments
- Emphasis on serving families one-to-one has built a strong foundation of family support for the school; there is greater two-way communication between the school and home
- The school climate is very friendly and positive
- High expectations from the school, parents, and students have increased accountability among all parties

Keys to Success

- Provide a wide variety of activities for families to participate in, incorporating food, fun, and freebies
- Look beyond the core group of parents who always volunteer to the majority of parents who may need a little coaxing
- Think of ways the school can serve parents and partner with them
- Tap into a variety of outside sources for volunteers and funding
- If parents are not coming to you, take school-sponsored programs out into the community where families live

Related Web Sites

- **Family Involvement Partnership for Learning**
  http://www.ed.gov/Family/
  This site from the U.S. Department of Education contains information about how communities can foster better parent involvement in schools.

- **Building Community Partnerships for Learning**
  http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong/
  This ambitious Web site, based on the publication *Strong Families, Strong Schools* by Jennifer Ballen and Oliver Moles, is from the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC). It provides a review of the past 30 years of key research findings on the importance of involving families in their children's learning, examples of family-involvement efforts that are working, and concrete ways in which different participants in the family-involvement partnership can help achieve success.

- **Pathways to School Improvement**
  http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/pa0cont.htm
  This site is maintained by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). It details critical issues relevant to the topic of parent and family involvement and also provides a listing of other pertinent resources.

- **Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE)**
  http://pfie.ed.gov/
  This site provides detailed information on PFIE, a collaborative sponsored primarily by the US Department of Education. PFIE was started in September 1994 by Secretary of Education Richard Riley in an effort to bring together employers, educators, families, religious groups, and community organizations to improve schools and raise student achievement.

REFERENCES

Boutte, G., Keepler, D., Tyler, V., & Terry, B. (1992). Effective techniques for involving "difficult" parents. *Young Children, 47*(3), 19-22.

Chavkin, N., & Williams, D. (1988). Critical issues in teacher training for parent involvement. *Educational Horizons, 66*(2), 87-89.

Comer, J., & Haynes, N. (1992). Summary of school development program effects. *The family is critical to student achievement.* Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Cotton, K., & Wikelund, K.R. (1989). *Parent Involvement in Education.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Decker, L., Gregg, G., & Decker, V. (1996). *Teacher's manual for parent and community involvement.* Alexandria, VA: National Community Education Association.

Epstein, J. (1996). Advances in family, community, and social partnerships. *New School, New Communities, 12*(3), 5-13.

Epstein, J. (1988, Winter). How do we improve programs for parent involvement? *Educational Horizons, 66*(2) 58-59.

Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(9), 701-712.

Harvard Family Research Project. (1995). *Raising our future: Families, schools, and communities joining together.* Cambridge, MA: Author.

Liontos, L. (1992). Family involvement. *Research Roundup, 8*(3). Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Manitoba Department of Education and Training. (1994). *Parents and schools: Partners in education.* Winnipeg (Manitoba), Canada: Manitoba Department of Education and Training, Student Support Branch.

McCollum, H., & Russo, A. (1993). *Model strategies in bilingual education: Family literacy and parent involvement.* Washington, DC: Department of Education.

National Association of Secondary School Principals. (1992). School and family partnerships. *The Practitioner, 18*(4), 1-8.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1996). *Father's involvement in their children's schools.* Washington, DC: Author.

Rich, D. (1995). Sparring partners; Handling the hard-to-please parent. *Instructor, 105*(4), 20-21.

Shartrand, A., Weiss, H., Kreider, H., & Lopez, M. (1997). *New skills for new schools: Preparing teachers in family involvement.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

Smith, C. (1997). The art of diplomacy: Winning the support of difficult parents. *Schools in the Middle, 6*(4), 37-40.

U.S. Department of Education. (1997). *Parent involvement and participation.* Washington, DC: Author.

Williams, D., & Chavkin, N. (1989). Essential elements of strong parent involvement programs. *Educational Leadership, 47*(2), 18-20.

Williams, D., & Chavkin, N. (1985). *Research-based guidelines and strategies to train teachers for parent involvement.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

NWREL Board of Directors

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Dr. Donald Robson (Chairperson)
Dean, School of Education
University of Montana

Mardene Collins (Vice Chairperson)
Teacher
Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (Alaska)

Mike Bernazzani (Secretary-Treasurer)
Superintendent, Educational Service District No. 105
Yakima (Washington)

Dr. Trudy Anderson
Director, Center of Educational Excellence
J.A. & Kathryn Albertson Foundation (Idaho)

Henry Beauchamp
Executive Director/CEO
Yakima Valley Opportunities Industrialization Center (Washington)

Dr. Robert Everhart (Past Chairperson)
Professor, School of Education
Portland State University (Oregon)

Olga L. Acuna
Teacher
Hillsboro School District (Oregon)

Scott Andrews
Media Specialist/Technology Coordinator
Miles City Unified School District (Montana)

Dr. Joyce Benjamin
Representative for Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction

Dr. Teresa Bergeson
Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Sally A. Brownfield
Teacher/Indian Education Programs Coordinator
Hood Canal School District (Washington)

Kathleen Harrington
Director, Plymouth Child Care Center (Montana)

Diana Herschbach
Businesswoman
Wasilla (Alaska)

Dr. Shirley Holloway
Alaska Commissioner of Education

Dr. Marilyn Howard
Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction

Dr. Michael Jaeger
Dean, School of Education
Eastern Oregon University

Nancy Keenan
Montana State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Henry Kilmer
Superintendent, Gooding Joint School District (Idaho)

Rachel Lyon
Teacher
Lewiston Independent School District (Idaho)

Rey A. Mayoral
High School Principal
Salem-Keizer School District (Oregon)

Christopher Read
Principal
Billings Catholic Schools (Montana)

Harry Rogers
Superintendent, Valdez City School District (Alaska)

Barry Rotrock
Superintendent, Oregon City School District (Oregon)

Joan Schmidt
Director
National School Boards Association (Montana)

Dr. Michael Schwinden
Principal
Great Falls School District (Montana)

Roger Wheeler
Principal
Pocatello School District (Idaho)

Acknowledgements

Editing

Samantha Moores

Design

Denise Crabtree

Production

Shannon Hillemeyer

Review

Debbie Ellis, Dawn Dzubay,
Bradley Lenhardt, & Ruth Culham

Proofreading

Elizabeth Blankenship & Susan Harper

NOTES:

Published quarterly for NWREL member institutions

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

To order additional copies of this booklet call 503/275-0666
For questions about the *By Request* series call 503/275-0454

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly, or in part, by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), Department of Education, under contract no RJ96006501. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the department, or any other agency of the U.S. government.

© 1999 Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory